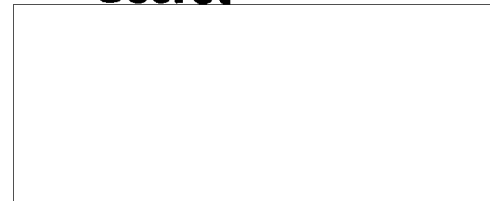


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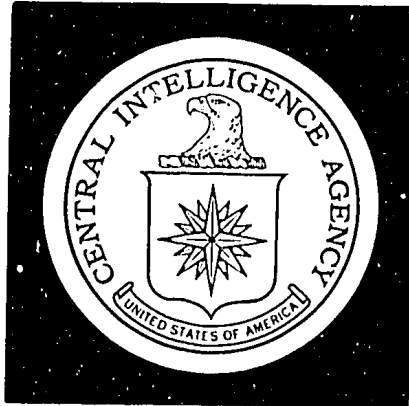
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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Communist Logistical Developments In Southern Laos  
And Cambodia During The 1971 Wet Season*



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
October 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST LOGISTICAL DEVELOPMENTS  
IN SOUTHERN LAOS AND CAMBODIA  
DURING THE 1971 WET SEASON

Introduction

1. As the Communists' 1970-71 dry season logistical campaign in southern Laos and Cambodia drew to a close in late May, most intelligence indicators pointed to Communist intentions of retaining a sizable logistic force in the Panhandle during the summer. A key question was whether this force would be used merely to maintain the system in anticipation of an early transportation start for the 1971-72 dry season or to actively move supplies into South Vietnam and Cambodia during the wet season. This memorandum presents an account of what the Communists' logistic accomplishments were during the 1971 wet season and makes some initial judgments about enemy logistic intentions in the forthcoming 1971-72 dry season.

Organizational Adjustments in Laos and Cambodia

2. The well-established 559th Transportation Group (TG) in the Laos Panhandle underwent only minor adjustments during the summer

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It is impossible to estimate accurately the total number of

*Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within CIA.*

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personnel withdrawn from southern Laos, but the number is believed to be small in comparison with the total troop strength in the Panhandle and did not markedly affect the enemy's rainy season logistic capability.<sup>(1)</sup>

4. The summer's most important organizational developments took place in the extreme southern Laos/Cambodia border area where the still evolving logistic system of the 470th TG continued to be expanded and reorganized.

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5. In addition to these organizational changes and unit shifts, the 470th TG expanded its facilities for handling traffic during the rainy season. A number of new storage areas and transshipment points were established and others were relocated to facilitate control of river traffic.

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Status of Lines of CommunicationLaotian Panhandle

6. During the summer, 559th TG personnel conducted an unprecedented road maintenance and repair program and began construction of several new roads which should become motorable early in the coming dry season. Communist road crews were largely successful (except for several brief periods in July) in keeping most major roads in motorable condition, partly because of lighter monsoon rains this season but also because of the extensive pre-season preparations taken to offset the rains. More specifically, drainage systems were significantly improved, hard-to-maintain route segments were shored up with logs and graveled, and large stockpiles of gravel and corduroy material were stockpiled along all trouble spots.

7. The Communists attempted to keep all the entry corridors open this year. They were successful at the Ban Karai Pass and the western DMZ where, except for brief periods, key roads remained in serviceable condition all summer. They failed to keep Mu Gia Pass open, however, because of widespread flooding there. Main routes leading from the Ban Karai and western DMZ entry corridors to enemy base areas near Tchepone, Ban Bac, and Chavane also received extensive care and were kept in motorable shape for most of the summer. In the western Panhandle, much of north/south Route 23/16 and the Route 231 structure were also maintained and periodically supported heavy truck traffic, probably in support of enemy troops fighting in the Bolovens Plateau area. The exit routes into South Vietnam and Cambodia, however, have remained in generally poor condition for much of the summer. Route 922 leading into GVN MR 1 was the only road showing any evidence of continuing repair efforts by the North Vietnamese until mid-September. On balance, it appears that the Communists' road system in southern Laos fared considerably better this rainy season than during the previous two summers. Unless the Panhandle is swept by severe storms or receives unusual amounts of monsoon rain during late September or October, it appears that the Communists' logistic system in southern Laos will be in good condition early in the coming dry season.

8. This year, as in past rainy seasons, several new road construction projects were begun by Communist engineers, the most significant being two new roads that are being built across the DMZ. During July, aerial observers reported that construction crews also were reopening portions of crossborder Route 110/613 leading south through the tri-border area and were building several spurs eastward off Route 613 into South Vietnam. Aerial reconnaissance over the area on 27 September revealed that some

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50 miles of motorable road had been cleared along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border. In addition, in early August, pilots reported road construction extending east from Route 96 north of Chavane, and subsequent reconnaissance has indicated that this will probably be a new exit route into southern GVN MR 1.

9. Little new information is available on the status of the petroleum pipelines leading from North Vietnam into the Panhandle through Mu Gia Pass and the western DMZ. In July aerial observers reported trenching activity along portions of Route 99 south of Muong Nong, suggesting further extension of the pipeline toward Ban Bac may be under way. Heavy jungle canopy and a lack of photographic coverage have hampered observation of a third new pipeline apparently being built southward along Route 137 in North Vietnam toward Ban Karai Pass. This line, first detected under construction in April 1971, may already have progressed across the border into Laos. Aerial photography of May and August revealed more than 100 miles of a new pipeline system under construction in North Vietnam between Hanoi and Vinh. When fully completed, this new pipeline will probably link up with other lines leading into the Hanoi-Haiphong area and could provide a means of pumping fuel from there deep into the southern Laos Panhandle. An indication of the priority attached to the completion of pipeline is the recent creation in southern North Vietnam of three Binh Trams to oversee pipeline construction and petroleum distribution.

#### Northeastern Cambodia

10. Monsoon weather closed cross-border Route 110/97 to vehicle traffic in late June or early July, but other key roads in northeastern Cambodia - Routes 13, 19, 126, and portions of 194 - remained motorable during the summer and supported light to moderate traffic. With the closure of Route 110/97, the Communists changed the mode of transport between southern Laos and Stung Treng to motorized sampans. Further south, aerial observers' and agents' reports indicate the several roads and three rivers which converge at Stung Treng have all carried considerable traffic during the past several months. Convoys of trucks, cycle-drawn carts, and motorized boats reportedly have moved nightly between Kratie and Stung Treng. From Stung Treng, Route 19 and the Tonle San have been used to transport supplies eastward to VC/NVA base areas astride the South Vietnam/Cambodia border. Supplies destined for western Cambodia have continued to move over Route 126 from the western bank of the Mekong opposite Stung Treng. With the onset of the upcoming dry season, Route 110/97 can be expected to again become the dominant supply route between southern Laos and Cambodia. Restoration of the route, which runs mostly through open, relatively flat terrain, should be rapid after the rains begin to taper off.

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Supply MovementsLaos

11. During the late stages of the 1970-71 dry season, when transportation efforts were hampered by early rains, Communist logistic forces operating in the Laos Panhandle showed a clear determination to keep supplies moving through the system at a significant level. However, as the rainy season advanced into June, the level of logistic activity began to fall markedly. Both sensor detections and pilot reports of truck sightings fell to only one-quarter of the level in May (see the chart). Nevertheless, the Communists continued their efforts to sustain supply movement. There is some evidence that the Panhandle-wide transportation offensive in May was continued into June.

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13. The monsoon season hit the Laos Panhandle with full force in early July, and the Communist logistic effort there assumed a rainy season profile which continued into September. Tropical storms Harriet and Kim brought enemy vehicle activity to a virtual standstill in the second week of July, and sensor detections between that time and 1 September averaged only 14 per day, compared with 69 per day for the same period a year earlier.<sup>(2)</sup> Similarly, pilot sightings of vehicles amounted to only one-third of those reported last year at this time.<sup>(3)</sup> During the July-August period, some routes maintained light activity according to sensors – for example, Routes 1032B and 1035 out of the western DMZ and Routes 99 and 917 in the central Panhandle carried some traffic. Some traffic also continued to move on Routes 966 and 922, the main exit routes into GVN MR 1

2. *Detections were less despite the doubling of active sensor strings this wet season compared with the summer of 1970.*

3. *The sortie rate this summer was down only slightly from last year.*

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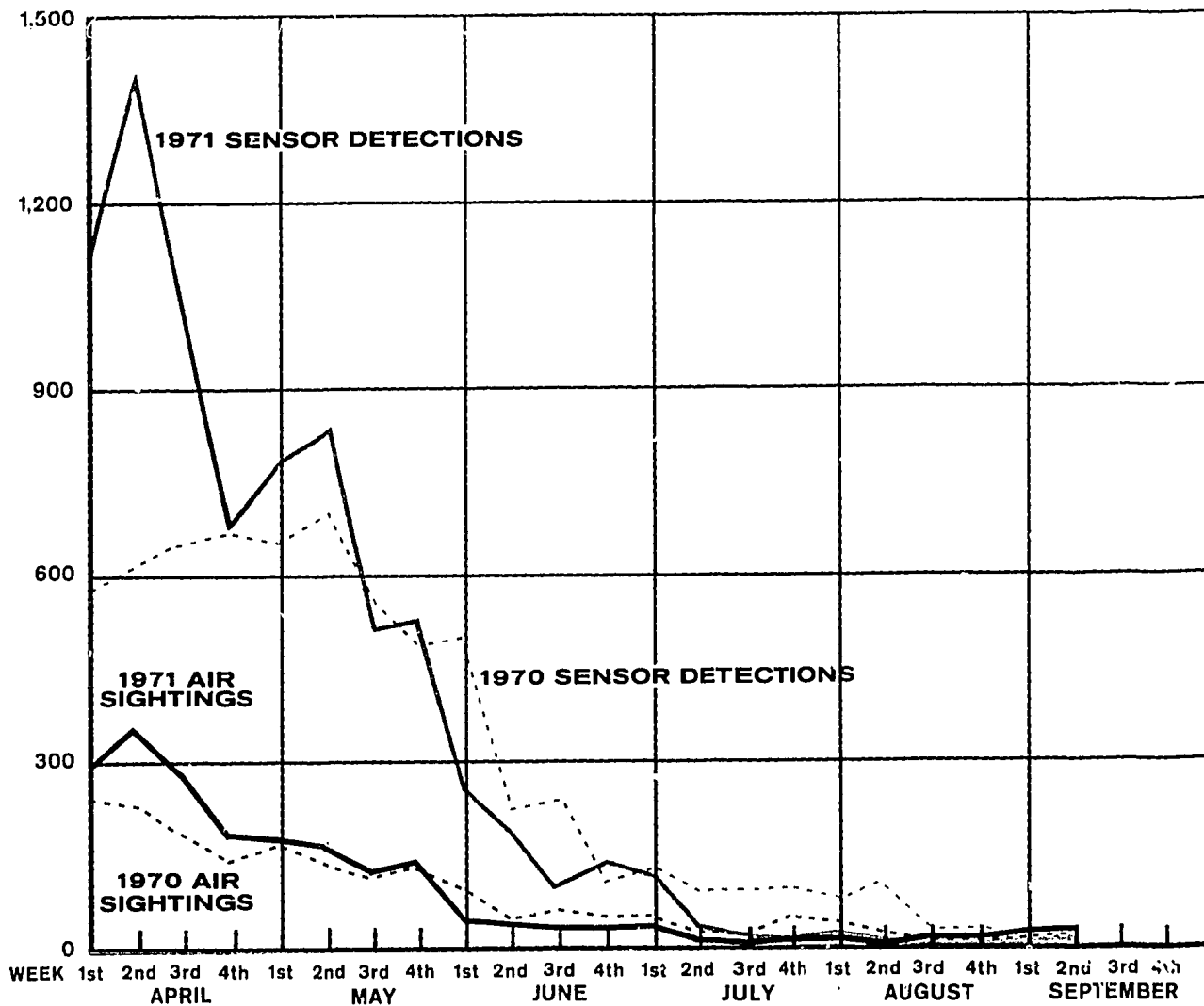


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## ENEMY TRUCK DETECTIONS IN THE LAOTIAN PANHANDLE April through Mid-September, 1970 and 1971

NOTE: Points on the graph represent daily average of detections per week.  
Data are plotted in weekly increments. Numbers of trucks  
are shown without regard to direction of movement or location.  
Each method of detection includes unavoidable multiple counting.

Number of Trucks



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[redacted]

during mid-July to mid-August. However, these route segments were exceptions, as detections on the remainder of the Panhandle road network virtually disappeared. Evidence of traffic flows from [redacted] reconnaissance (photography and Forward Air Controllers) over the Panhandle road net during the wet season has reflected the same trends recorded by sensors.(4)

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14. No documentable explanation for the unexpectedly low level of activity through most of July and August is available. In the past two rainy seasons, some degree of activity has generally been sustained during these months. This year, with most of the Communist logistic structure remaining intact, it appeared that the enemy would once again follow that pattern. In terms of weather, the enemy's opportunity to do so was better than last year: August, traditionally a very wet month, showed significantly less rainfall than was experienced a year earlier. Still, the very low level of activity persisted, presumably as a result of a conscious decision on the part of the North Vietnamese. Communist logistical planners in Hanoi may have chosen to have North Vietnamese logistic forces in the Panhandle concentrate overwhelmingly on the maintenance of the lines of communication, with supply movements being limited largely to those absolutely essential to maintain the Communist force structure in place during the summer.

#### Cambodia

15. While the Panhandle system reflected little traffic during much of the rainy season, the Cambodian sector of the 470th area maintained an impressive level of logistic activity. The onset of the rainy season in the 470th area forced a change in the primary mode of transportation (as indicated earlier) but failed to stop it from moving supplies. [redacted]

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[redacted] Large tonnages of supplies, mainly rice and petroleum,

4. *Aerial reconnaissance also indicated that, unlike past rainy seasons, the Communists did not use the Se Bang Hieng and Se Kong Rivers to free float supplies. The limited use of these waterways this wet season can be attributed to several factors: the elaborate channel guide system in the Se Bang Hieng was completely destroyed by bombing during Lam Son 719; new roads have been built alongside each of the rivers; and the operational petroleum pipeline leading deep into the Muong Nong area of Laos have all greatly reduced the enemy's dependence on waterborne supply shipments.*

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[redacted]

were transported from south to north while significant amounts of arms, ammunition, and equipment were moved southward. [redacted]

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Preparations for the 1971-72 Dry Season

16. During the past several weeks, there have been a number of indications that the Communists are gearing up for the coming dry season supply push.

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17. Because of the continuous repair program, the Laotian road net will probably emerge from the rainy season in better shape than ever before. Unless preparations are set back by unexpectedly late heavy rains as

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happened last year, the major lines of communication in the Panhandle should be capable of reaching nearly full operational status in a relatively short period. This was demonstrated in the first 10 days of September, when the roads began to dry out and rivers and streams became passable following several weeks of milder weather in the Laos Panhandle. The Communists took full advantage of the break to get more vehicles moving in the system. Sensor detections and pilot sightings reflected an increase in activity to a level well above that of the previous two months or of the comparable period last year. Subsequent heavy rains caused detections to decline sharply, although sightings have continued to be well above those of a year ago.

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19. Recent developments in North Vietnam provide additional evidence that the Communists are preparing for another big dry season logistic campaign. A substantial increase in truck imports

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will complement an already well-stocked truck park and provide insurance against another year of heavy truck losses in southern Laos.<sup>(5)</sup> The new roads under construction across the western DMZ will enable enemy forces in the area to be supplied directly through the DMZ rather than through Laos. Improved antiaircraft defenses in southern North Vietnam will also improve the North Vietnamese ability to defend their resupply system.

20. Despite all of the above measures, additional tasks remain to be done before the North Vietnamese can launch a full-scale logistics push

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[redacted]

in Laos and Cambodia. Road work, particularly on the Panhandle exit routes, remains to be completed. There remains a significant amount of personnel shifting to be accomplished as units (particularly antiaircraft) return from North Vietnam or are redeployed within the Panhandle. The replacement of logistic personnel withdrawn from Laos after the past dry season apparently has already begun on a limited scale. The prospects for an early start during the dry season will depend heavily on prevailing weather conditions over the next four to six weeks. However complex and sophisticated, the Communist logistic network in Indochina remains in large part at the mercy of the area's weather.

### Summary and Conclusions

21. Never before in the course of the war have the Communists made such a determined effort to maintain key segments of the Laotian road system during the wet season. Significantly, however, although the Communists worked hard to keep the principal roads open in southern Laos, they made little effort to sustain a flow of supplies. Detected supply movements in the Panhandle were much lower this wet season than in 1970 and were unexpectedly low in August, when an unseasonable slackening in the rain would have permitted considerably greater activity than was evident. One explanation for this is that Communist logistic planners may have decided to concentrate primarily on the maintenance of the network, with supply movements being limited largely to those essential to maintaining the Communist force structure in place. From the North Vietnamese point of view, the gain from this would be in having their road network and personnel ready to begin moving supplies early in the coming dry season.

22. During the past several weeks, there have been a number of indications that the Communists are preparing for another big dry season logistic campaign. [redacted]

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[redacted] have built two new roads across the DMZ, extended the petroleum pipeline system in North Vietnam, and augmented antiaircraft defenses in southern North Vietnam. Because of these developments and the extensive road repair program carried out during the summer in the Laotian Panhandle, the North Vietnamese should emerge from this rainy season in a better position to carry out their logistic effort than a year ago.

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